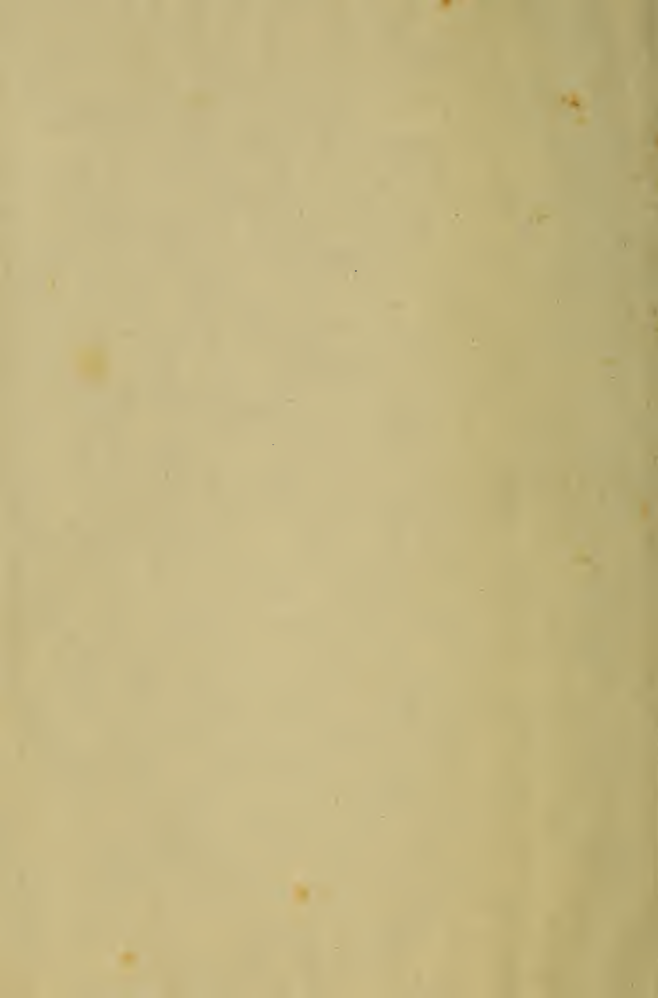


LIFE  
OF  
JOHN ERSKINE  
OF DUN

JOHN MACLAREN & SON.







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LIFE OF JOHN ERSKINE OF DUN.

Thomas F. Tomney

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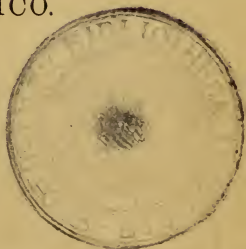
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J O H N E R S K I N E O F D U N .

1508-1591.

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S C O T O - B R I T A N N I C O .



E D I N B U R G H :

J O H N M A C L A R E N A N D S O N .

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## P R E F A C E.

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THE wants of the nineteenth century seem to prove that the fullest and most faithful patriotism is to promote every means calculated to revive the interest and reawaken the curiosity to know more of these Worthies of a past age who were a "Naphtali, full with the blessing of the Lord." We ought, then, to inquire and search diligently concerning these mighty men of valour, famous in the house of their fathers, who, "having understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do,"

like the tribe of Issachar, do it, promptly and well.

A modern author well observes : “ We have the highest of all authorities for inculcating principle and conveying knowledge by means of biographies. The Scriptures have been regarded by some as mainly made up by the lives, the doings, and the sufferings of men ; and it deserves observation, that, in tracing the exact history of our own nation in particular, the knowledge of the secret springs and causes of events the most momentous, must generally be gathered from the lives of men who scourged their country by their vices, or blessed it by their virtues.” Of this last class assuredly was the heroic and patriotic Baron of Dun, whose whole life but verified the words of his epitaph—

“ He did what ought to be taught,  
And taught what ought to be done.”

His times were indeed evil. The old darkness of a tyrannous and knowledge-degrading superstition still hovered over the crushed and cowed people of Scotland. The very words of Jehovah were clothed in the unknown jargon of Dog-Latin. There was no one to explain the “end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls.” The Roman Church was at its height, depraving the doctrines of God’s Word. On the Continent alone there was a dawning of light.

Few of the noble confessors of this period are more worthy of being honoured with deathless fame than John Erskine of Dun. It needed a brave spirit to resist the imperious and cruel power of Rome’s minions,

but Erskine was just the man to do it, and to do it resolutely. The Pulpit and the Press had already done their part, but here we have a landed proprietor uniting with these agents in the work of bringing true religion to enlighten the then degraded commonalty. It is the lasting glory of himself and his family to have had "no small share in beginning and carrying on our Reformation from Popish tyranny and slavery; and he continued in a public and private capacity for twenty or thirty years, in which, by conversation, reading, meditation, and prayer, he grew in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and discovered very fully the abominations of Popery" (*Wodrow*).

Erskine truly took a leading part in the work of Reformation. Under the auspices

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of Knox, he composed the "Godly Band" of 1557, in which its subscribers promised, "before the majesty of God and His congregation," to maintain the Reformed religion. This Band was one of the great means by which the standard of gospel light and liberty was set up with the Charter of Christianity inscribed on its folds in imperishable letters of gold. Again and again has the enemy sought to tear it down, and to hide its honours from the Christian world's admiring gaze; but the great Head of the Church renerves His servants' arms, that for a time seemed faint and feeble, and anon the unfurled banner waves again in the breeze, and the soldiers of the Cross fight on and conquer through Christ the Captain of their salvation and their living Head. From these spiritual glories the

British Isles derive their true fame and permanent security.

All who took part in the glorious work of Reformation deserve to have their names kept in everlasting remembrance, and to have a particular description of their toil and labour, and the opposition which they encountered in their noble work, handed down to posterity.

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# LIFE OF JOHN ERSKINE OF DUN.



## CHAPTER I.

### FAMILY AND EARLY LIFE OF ERSKINE OF DUN.

T the commencement of the sixteenth century, the spiritual state of Scotland was very dark. For ages the Church of Rome with all its corruptions had held undisputed sway in the land. The country was filled with priests and friars, abbeys and monasteries, for whose maintenance the hard-working people were drained of their means. It is computed that at this time at least half the wealth of Scot-

land flowed into the coffers of the Church. This was partly derived from the teinds, but much also from the immense amount of heritable property held by the ecclesiastical corporations, for the acquisition of which they frequently abused those spiritual powers with which the credulity of the people had invested them.

In the previous century the gross darkness of Roman ignorance and superstition had been in some places dispelled by the propagation of the doctrines of Wickliffe and Huss, by Resby and Cwarar; but the tyrannical persecution of the priests had stamped out every spark of spiritual light save in Kyle, where some obscure Lollards still lingered. It was in this dark and melancholy age that John Erskine was born at Dun Castle, in Forfarshire, in the year 1508-9.

The family of the Erskines of Dun is by

some thought to have been connected with the house of Mar, and was, at any rate, an honourable family. Erskine's father and grandfather, along with other members of the family, fell on the bloody field of Flodden (1513). On this account Richard Melville of Baldovey (an estate in the neighbourhood of Dun) and his brother were appointed Erskine's guardians, with his mother's consent. She was a daughter of Lord Ruthven.

Bowick, clerk to Burness, town-clerk of Montrose, who had access to the council papers, says Erskine received his academical education at Aberdeen, and made a respectable figure there. Buchanan confirms this, saying that he was learned and honourable. After he left college, Bowick maintains that he cultivated at the Castle of Dun, Christian and classical writers, and invited many learned men to partake of his hospitality and

friendship. In 1530 he appears to have killed a priest, named Sir Thomas Forster, in Montrose. No account of this sad affair is preserved, except a document containing an assythemment of manbote or compensation, which, according to the custom of the day, Erskine paid to his victim's father, Sir William Forster, a burgess of Montrose. There is no doubt that this event must have left a most painful impression on Erskine's mind, and have had great influence in the formation of his character.

In the Dun Charter Chest we find a licence from James V. granted to "our louvit John Erskine, elder of Dun," for his "gude, trew, and thankful service done to us," to travel to France or Italy or other foreign parts by land and sea, and there to remain for the doing of his pilgrimage or other lawful errands. This practice of completing their education abroad was commonly

adopted at this period by young Scotsmen of rank. Erskine chose the eldest of the Melvilles for his travelling companion on this journey, and repaired immediately to Wittemberg in Saxony. Its university is memorable as the cradle of the Reformation, for from its academical chair Luther exposed the corruptions of Rome. Whether mere curiosity drew Erskine thither, or whether he had already imbibed the doctrines of the Reformation we cannot tell. But it is probable that after prosecuting his studies there under that distinguished reformer and scholar Philip Melancthon, Erskine returned to his native land a staunch Protestant.

Dr. J. A. Wylie says of him: "After his father's death, a good deal of his time was spent in the discharge of those duties which naturally devolve on one of his position in his native land. He often took his seat on

the magistrate's bench; the citizens of Montrose, glad to avail themselves of his talents, probity, and weight of character, almost always elected him as their provost. He varied his labours as a civic and county administrator of justice by occasional attendance in Parliament. He was still young when he abandoned Popery. Neither the year of his conversion nor the place is known. It is probable that the light shone upon him when abroad. He could not be in Germany or France at that time without coming in contact with the reformed opinions, and even with the Reformers; and a mind so candid, so capacious, could hardly fail to see their truth and relish their beauty." The light shone clear into his heart, for we find Knox speaking of him as "one whom God in those days had marvellously illuminated."

It is in this character that we find our

next notice of him in the account of the martyrdom of David Straiton of Laurieston. This man was much employed in the fishing trade. The Bishop of Moray claimed tithe of his fish, but he refused, as he hated the priests for their pride and profligacy. He was then excommunicated and summoned for heresy. He had been very stubborn and even vicious in his youth, despising all reading; but he now got acquainted with Erskine of Dun, his neighbour, "a man marvellously enlightened in respect of these times." Straiton "frequented much" his company, and by reading in the New Testament was brought to a knowledge of the truth. In company with Norman Gourlay, he was burned at Greenside in 1534.

In his profession of Protestantism, Erskine was not supported by his family, for we find that a relative, Robert Erskine, was Canon

of the Collegiate Church or Chapel Royal of St. Mary de Rupe (Kirkheugh); another, Adam Erskine, was Commendator of Cambuskenneth, and the Prioress of Elcho had the "teind sheaves" of the Mains of Dun.

Erskine's great concern for the educational welfare of his country receives a remarkable illustration in his establishment of a Greek school in Montrose. On his return from the Continent, he brought with him one Pierre de Marsilliers, a French scholar, to teach this language; then so little studied in Scotland, that it was regarded even by some of the priesthood as a "new language, to teach which was heresy." So far as we know, Erskine's Greek school was the first of its kind in Scotland. Greek was so well taught here, that Andrew Melville, who received his education in Montrose, astonished the University of St. Andrews by his profi-



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ciency in what was then considered a rare attainment.

So far as the persecuting tendencies of the time would permit, Erskine studied the Bible deeply in his leisure hours, and by degrees ascertained the principles for the government of the Church which were afterwards carried out in the land. The Castle of Dun was at this time very unlike other baronial residences. Instead of the sounds of feasting and revelry within, and of horn and hound without, were heard the sounds of praise and prayer, for Erskine opened his house, as became his rank and station, to scholars and lovers of the Evangel. The Bible was openly read and expounded in his household—all who wished instruction in the truth knew they would find it there. The door of Dun House stood open to them, and frequent gatherings took place under its roof, its accomplished host acting the part

both of entertainer and instructor. Very fruitful did John Erskine make this part of our Scottish soil. Wishart and Walter Mill both belonged to this district; and the two Melvilles, Andrew and James, were born within a few miles of his mansion.

Calderwood observes that, in 1539, many of the nobility and gentry (howbeit, in secret) favoured the Reformation. Among those whose names deserve to be kept in remembrance on this account were Lords Ruthven, Errol, and Methven. At this time there were in Edinburgh remarkable professors—Auldjo, Maine, and Lindsay, Sybilla Lindsay, spouse to John Fowler, with others, who suffered much for the cause of Christ, especially Alexander, Earl of Glencairn, who was a fervent professor of the truth. Erskine, more particularly, sought to disenthral the national mind by literature and the faithful study of the Scriptures. For henceforth the

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Bible was to be at once the repository and standard of Divine truth in Scotland, as it contains all that is necessary to be believed or practised in religion. Faith in the Scriptures, and submission to their authority, is, indeed, of the very essence of the Church's existence. She is bound, by the authority of her Divine Head, and the charter of her heavenly constitution, to hold fast the whole of their sacred contents.

Erskine's connection with Wishart is merely conjectured by some historians; but Petrie says that Wishart ministered the communion with both elements at Dun House, during his stay at Montrose, whither he had fled on the breaking out of the plague at Dundee. Some of our authorities also say that Wishart succeeded Pierre de Marsilliers in Erskine's Greek school at Montrose, and taught there until accused by the Bishop of Brechin for heresy, when he

abandoned the school, and fled the country. It is very probable that Erskine was acquainted with the great preacher, as Pitarrow, the property of Wishart's brother, is near Dun, and the martyr's labours were chiefly confined to Forfarshire. In the murder of Beaton, and the consequent siege and capture of St. Andrews, Erskine apparently was not concerned. But it is probable that his preservation from priestly vengeance during the successive persecutions of these trying times was due to his great respectability of character, and his approved loyalty and patriotism.

Of Erskine's first marriage there is apparently no record. The only one mentioned is his second, probably about this time, to one Barbara de Bierle, maid of honour to Queen Mary of Guise. In the Dun Charter Chest are several feudal instruments, commencing with a procuratory of resignation by John

Erskine of Dun, and Barbara Bierle, his spouse, of the lands of Kirkbuddo and Hoyle Myle in favour of James Erskine, their son. This transfer of land was a lengthy process, for we find six separate documents, all relating to the grant to James Erskine, extending over a period of twenty years, from 1552 to 1572. According to feudal custom, they are first resigned "to the Queen's most excellent Majesty, and the Duke of Chatelherault, her tutor," to be held of them by the said James Erskine. The paucity of documents relating to the Dun family is remarkable. Perhaps some of their papers may have suffered from the ravages of Montrose while commanding for Charles I. in Scotland, for his bitter enmity to Presbyterianism would very probably induce him to plunder Dun House. This seems the more likely from a letter from Lord Grange to Wodrow, in which he says

that he believes “one Wishart, who wrote Montrose’s life, got many of the Superintendent’s papers from Lord Dun’s own grandfather. If that man (Wishart) was among them, it is to be feared he would destroy all which he conceived might do justice to the Reformation and the Reformers.”

The English, having taken offence that the matrimonial alliance proposed between Edward VI. and Mary of Scotland had not been realised, declared war in 1547. Erskine of Dun, as Provost of Montrose and High Constable, offices which his grandfather had held before him, had to provide for the defence of the town against any hostile descent. A night attack was attempted by the English fleet, but the inhabitants had warning of their approach. Calderwood’s account of the affair is as follows :—

“They thought to have surprised Montrose, but by the vigilance of Johne Areskine

of Dun, Proveist of the toun, their interprise was perceaved and prevented, and they driven back to their shippes with the losse of some men. The English fleet came hither expecting no opposition, and by this time he had encouraged so plentifully that a thousand men were in arms, and placed centinels in every part where they were most likely to be attacked; and he selected three hundred men to be shrouded until he gave them the signal. By the break of day the fleet hastened to the town, and were quite unprepared for a defeat." The Laird of Dun managed so skilfully as to force on the retreat of the enemy. They never looked back at the pursuing Scots, but at length gained their ships, much the worse for their encounter. The whole history of the campaign of 1548-9 has many passages very honourable to Erskine. He was selected on one occasion to reconnoitre the English

camp, and at the head of some Scottish soldiers did wonders against the enemy. On all occasions he gave signal proofs of his loyalty and courage. This bold and zealous bearing of Erskine should be remembered, as evincing his courage in war as well as his pious conduct in time of peace.

His services in the defence of his country were rated at their full value. In the Dun Charter Chest we find three letters from Mary of Guise, the Queen Dowager, in which she speaks of "your gude service done to our derrest dochter your Soverane and her authority," in 1549. Such was his reputation in his own neighbourhood that he was almost always chosen Provost of Montrose, and there is extant a precept infesting him in the customs of that town. His influence was much felt here in the cause of the Reformed religion after his return from the Continent, and



the town, through its trade with the Low Countries, imported many copies of the Scriptures, thus greatly facilitating the Reformation.

## CHAPTER II.

## ERSKINE OF DUN AND JOHN KNOX.

THE Protestants of Edinburgh had formed themselves into a sort of regular church, electing for themselves elders and deacons, and organising as they best might. They had, however, two separate meetings, until the arrival of the Laird of Dun from the North, when he, by the exercise of that gentle tact which was so prominent a feature in his character, united them in one congregation. He sometimes taught his fellow-Protestants in private houses at this time, a duty for the performance of which he had doubtless perfect ability, as he was called to it by the

preachers, elders, and deacons. His adherence to their cause was a great encouragement to them to persevere boldly in their work, both from his rank as Baron of Dun and his familiar acquaintance with the Protestants on the Continent. His enthusiasm in the cause of literature and education no doubt increased his weight among his friends.

The vagueness of Erskine's ecclesiastical position at this time is an example of our want of information on matters of this description in the Churches of the Reformation. Wodrow says he wishes he had more light on this subject,—the ministry and ordination of our first reformers; but we are in the same situation as the other Protestant Churches, who have the same lack of full information on these subjects as ourselves. If the darkness on these points baffled the patient and life-long industry of

Wodrow, we may well give up the search in despair.

Shortly after this time, in the autumn of 1555, the question of the unlawfulness of communion with Papists in their idolatrous sacraments began to be agitated among the Reformers. Knox, at the conference held on this subject, made their duty so plain that a great secession was made from the Popish meetings. Knox having by this time returned to Edinburgh, was lodging at the house of James Sim. With him Erskine had many secret communings, and continued to teach "sometimes in the house of Robert Barron, sometimes in the Abbey, and occasionally in Robert Watson's house: the small number increased daylie until the time of perfect Reformation."

In these meetings Erskine's friendship and esteem for Knox must have risen rapidly to the highest standard of mutual affection

and godly confidence. They were both men of strong and genial feelings, both glowed with ardent desire that Christ's name might be great and His interests flourish, and knew that, to cast out the Amalekite that dwelt in the land, they must peril all, even life itself. Such was their longing for the Bread of Life which the minions of Rome had withheld from them that, though danger and death stared them in the face, they met, they prayed, they expounded the Word of God, and took sweet counsel together, strengthening each other in the good ways of the Lord. And thus their light and life grew great as a spreading vine.

The result of these communings was, that Erskine twice invited Knox to come to his house at Dun; which, considering the persecuting tendencies of the time, was a brave and noble act, and evinced that he was steadfast in his Reformation principles.

During Knox's last visit the communion of the Lord's Supper was administered by him there. He continued at Dun a month on this occasion, and preached every day during his visit. The principal persons in the neighbourhood attended his sermons. At these exercises Erskine saw "some godlie professors" who were still weak in the faith, and, in order to solve their perplexities in shaking off the old shackles of Romish ceremonies, he assembled a large company to supper, and invited John Knox to address them. He did so "so painfully, perspicuously, and pertinently," that many accepted the reformed faith. The hearts of many in Angus, Mearns, and Fife were so strengthened that they sought to have among them the face of a church. Shortly after this the gentlemen of the Mearns engaged to renounce the Roman communion, and to maintain the preaching of the Gospel

as Providence gave them opportunity. In the Greek school established by Erskine at Montrose we can well believe that Knox would take much interest.

Before this service at Dun, Knox had already dispensed the communion at the Earl of Glencairn's house at Finlayston and other places, for which he was summoned to "compear" in the church of the Greyfriars at Edinburgh. Erskine of Dun and several other gentlemen had consented to accompany him to this tribunal, "howbeit the dyett held not," probably from fear of the public indignation. Knox soon after left the country, and was condemned in his absence.

Perhaps a lordly hierarchy and their church-enslaved followers may have looked with scorn on the devoted band that daily resorted to the preaching of the Reformers. When Erskine gathered the Protestants to his house at Dun it was indeed the day

of small things, but great results followed.

The Godly Band or Covenant which founded the confederacy known as the Lords of the Congregation was not signed till 3rd December, 1557, but the many consultations which must have taken place before it was signed probably began shortly after this date. Although it is our practice to confine the name of Covenanters to the testifying patriots of the Fifty Years' Struggle, this the earliest of these bands proves that it was the habit of our Protestant forefathers from the first beginnings of the Reformation to combine in a covenant. The Godly Band is signed by the Earls of Argyle, Glencairn, and Morton, Lord Lorn, and John Erskine of Dun. It is preserved among the "writs" of the ancient family of the Cuninghames of Balgonie, in a manuscript which competent judges have asserted is



older by nine years than the oldest copy of Knox's history. It was as follows :—

“ Wee perceiving how Satan doth in his members, the Antichrist of our Time cruellie rage, seeking to overthrow and destroy the gospel of Christ and His Congregation ought, according to our bounden duties, strive in our Master's cause, even to the Death, being certane of the victory in Him. The which our dutie being well considered, we do promise before the Majestie of God and His Congregation, that we, by His grace, sall with all diligence continuallie applie our whole power, substance, and our verie lifes to menteane, sett forwards, and establish the most Blessed Word of God and His Congregation : and sall labour at our possibilitie, to have faithful Ministers, truelie and purlie to minister Christ's Gospel and Sacraments to His People. We sall menteane them, nourish them, and defend them, and

the whole Congregation of Christ, and every member thereof, at our whole power and waging our lives, against Satan and all wicked powers, that doth intend Tyrannie or Trouble against the foresaid Congregation. Unto the which Holie Word and Congregation, we doe joyne ourselves and so doe forsake and renounce the Congregation of Satan, with all the superstitious abominations and idolatrie thereof, and moreover, sall declare ourselves manifestlie enemies, thereto, by our faithful promise before God, Testified to His Congregation by our subscription to these presents, God called to Witness.

“ A : ERLE OF ARGLE.

“ GLENCAIRN.

“ MORTOUN.

“ ARCHBALD LORD LORN.

“ JOHN ARESKINE OF DUN.

&c. &c.

“ *Sic subscribitur.*”

The Scottish Parliament, in its meeting in December, 1557, appointed eight commissioners or ambassadors to be present at the approaching marriage of Queen Mary with the Dauphin of France. These were the Earls of Cassilis and Rothes; Lord Fleming; Seton, Provost of Edinburgh; Beaton, Archbishop of Glasgow; Reid, Bishop of Orkney; the Lord James, Prior of St. Andrews; and John Erskine of Dun. Erskine could not well have refused although the Reformation was not yet perfected. As yet its founders only thought of each other's spiritual welfare, and had no combined plan to rescue the Gospel from the gigantic tyranny which oppressed it, and to open up wells of salvation for all the people.

This interruption and its fatal consequences must have been a sore trial to the Laird of Dun, although he took with him on his journey to France many of his com-

panion - confessors of Christ's "Evangel." Yet there were some of the ambassadors who looked upon the reformer with an evil eye, such as Beaton of Glasgow, Reid of Orkney, and the Lord James, Prior of St. Andrews. The Prior was then in darkness, but soon afterwards he saw his way to cast in his lot with the party of the Reformation.

Even in the midst of the marriage festivities, public duty was pressing, and as they journeyed to France, John Knox and the Laird of Dun, at the instance of the Protestant Lords, drew up a petition to the Queen Regent for the exercise of their religion. It ran as follows :—

"The subjects of this realm of Scotland wish to the most excellent Princess Marie Queen Dowager and Regent all felicity. Most noble Princess, it is not unknown to your Majesty our ardent desire to see the

name of God glorified in this our native land, and we have made often humble suit to your Grace to have your good will and protection to live quietly and in free conscience without oppression of Tyrants, according to the will of our God made manifest to us in the Holy Scriptures. And because some men, who have most unjustly entered themselves by Title and name as ministers of God's truth are conspired together against the Lord and His Anointed to put down His name and honour and to mentean most odious abominations, we have forsaken them and their detestable ministry, knowing them to be accursed of God : and according to the Scriptures we have received such ministers as with humble minds submit themselves, their doctrine and ministry to the Word of God and tryal thereof : of whom we have experience that they do minister truelie according to the institution

of our Saviour. And now, Madam, the Bishop of St. Andrews by the corrupt counsel of most wicked and ungodly persons, hath given forth letters of summons against our ministers, to compear at St. Andrews or otherwhere such day as he hath appointed in his letters, (the copy whereof, being required, was refused) to underly the most corrupt judgement of them whose counsell in this case he does most follow. And knowing how dangerous a thing it's to enter under their hands nor to compear before them, unless they be accompanied with such as may be able to defend them from violence and tyranny, whereof we have had experience. But to stop all tumults and other inconveniences that may thereby occur we most humbly offer ourselves and ministers to come before your Grace and Council, to abide tryall in all things that they have to lay to the charge of us and our ministers accord-

ing to the word of God. Beseeching your Grace, as you ought of duty, and as you are placed of God above his people to take our cause, or rather the cause of God, to be tried most justly, according to the Holy Scriptures before yourself; and put inhibition to the said Bishops, to proceed no farther untill tryall be taken as said is, unto the which your Grace shall find us at all times ready as shall please you to command.

“And your Grace’s good answer wee  
“Most humbly beseech.”

We have given the whole petition, not wishing to suppress any part of it, for from it we may learn that it was to the absolute freedom of the Scriptures of Truth that the Reformers attached so much importance.

The marriage of Mary with the Dauphin took place in Paris on the 24th of April, 1558. Four of the Scottish commissioners died in France, not without suspicion of

poison ; but the subject of our memoir got back in safety, and prosecuted the Reformation, while many in Angus and Fife openly renounced Popery, and submitted themselves to Christ's instituted ordinances. During the absence of the commissioners, the martyrdom of Walter Mill had taken place—a deed which roused anew the religious fervour of the people. In this year, though so shortly before that of perfect Reformation, the prospects of a godly settlement were very dark. Most of the Protestants were in hiding ; only two or three are known to have preached openly, but one in this honourable list was Erskine of Dun.

Erskine and many other zealous men drew up a petition to the Queen Regent for liberty to read Old and New Testaments in our common tongue, and that the state ecclesiastical might be reformed, and “ may the Spirit of the Lord Jesus move your Grace's



heart to justice and equitie." The petition was expressed in the most loyal terms, but its requests were denied until the Queen Dowager had arranged her daughter's marriage settlements. She at last summoned the preachers to appear at Stirling. They were assembled at Perth, which had embraced the Reformation, with the Lords of the Congregation. The Lords resolved to accompany their ministers, and make joint-confession with them; but, lest such a conference should alarm Her Majesty, "the Laird of Dun went to Stirline, to certifie her, their intentioun was to give confessioun with their preachers, and to assist them with their just defence. She, understanding the fervencie of the people, "begane to craft with him." He, being a man of tractable nature, and willing to pleasure her in all things not repugnant to God's will, wrote to these that were assembled at Perth to stay, and not come

forward, showing what promise and hope he had of the Queen's Grace her favour." Some desired to follow out their purpose; yet, at Erskine's request, the whole multitude did not go. Upon this, the Queen Regent gave charge to put them, on their non-appearance, to the Horn, and "to inhibite all men, under paine of rebelloun, to assist, comfort, receave, or mainteane them in aine sort." The Laird of Dun, perceiving this extremity, prudently withdrew from Stirling to escape imprisonment, and, coming to Perth, did not conceal how much he distrusted the Regent's want of truth.

Both he and Knox were most careful to prevent extreme steps, and were anxious to keep down the ardour of the people, which was inflamed by the Regent's disingenuous dealing. Nevertheless, many irregularities did occur, both at Perth and at Scone; but we must fully acquit Erskine of taking any


part in them, as, on the contrary, he did his best to put them down.

The war which ensued on this dispute lasted till the death of the Queen Regent (June, 1560). Shortly before she died, the Lords of the Congregation opened negotiations with England for help in the struggle. So great was Erskine's share in the most arduous affairs of State, that we find his signature, as that of one of the most prominent of the Protestant Lords, set to the instructions given to the Scots Commissioners, who concluded the Treaty of Berwick with the Duke of Norfolk, against the French, at Leith. After the expulsion of these French mercenaries, the Estates in Parliament took charge of the administration on a thoroughly Protestant basis, making good laws for "abolishing the mass and confirming the true religion." In the end of the same year the first General Assembly met,

consisting of twelve ministers and sundry ruling elders, of whom John Erskine of Dun was one. He sat as representative for the town of Montrose, together with one Andrew Mill. The idea which he had sought to realise was, "a Church countenanced, recognised, and supported by the State, for the purpose of enabling it more effectually to gain its proper object—that of instructing the people in the Gospel of Christ, and governing them by His laws, thereby promoting at once their eternal interest and temporal welfare, and thus contributing indirectly, yet powerfully, to the benefit of civil society and the welfare of the State, by checking vice at the fountain, forming habits of sobriety and virtue, and producing conscientious and cheerful subjection to public authority" (*M'Crie*).

As it was not till 1590 that all "true policy" of the Church was concluded, now,

in their first arrangements, such as were thought meetest, were appointed to be visitors of kirks, whereby ministers might be planted and admitted to their office throughout the kingdom, instructed in their duties, and censured in case of negligence or other faults, either in their persons or callings. These were called Superintendents, and were in the first case appointed by the Estates, subject to the approval of those Churches over which they were set, and confirmed subsequently by the Assembly. The Laird of Dun was appointed Superintendent of Angus and Mearns. Wodrow affirms that those of the superintendents not yet in the ministry (among whom was Erskine) were ordained when the Assembly met, and says, "Although we have no particular accounts of this procedure by historians, yet in the loss of circumstantial relations we may be persuaded of the great carefulness



of the Church, even from its infancy, as to the regular and scriptural entry and admission of persons into the holy office of the ministry." We find the name of "Johne Areskine of Dun" in a list of twelve persons all "thought to be apt and able ministers of the New Testament," by the Assembly. He was also among those appointed to read the Word in the mother-tongue to the people, and to praise and exhort as pastors.

The other superintendents now appointed were John Spotswood, for Lothian; \* John

\* Wodrow gives a recital of the forms resorted to at the appointment of a superintendent, and the same form was no doubt observed in the appointment of Erskine of Dun. "That the Lords of Secret Council had given charge, and power to the Churches of Lothian, to chuse Mr. John Spotswood, Superintendant of Lothian, Stirling, Linlithgow, Haddington and Dunbar, and the Lords, Barons, Gentlemen and others having vote in election, according to the Treaty." From this we see, that they needed the concurrence of the Civil Magistrate, and the consent of the Churches.

After sermon Mr. Spotswood was called up, and

Winram, for Fife; John Willocks, for Glasgow and the West; and John Carswell, for Argyle and the Isles. Spotswood had

ten questions were put to him. The first and last only shall be quoted.

*Question.* "Seeing you have the *thirst* and *desire* of this people, do you not think to this yourself bound in conscience, before God, to support them, that so earnestly call for your comfort and the fruit of your labours?"

*Answer.* "I desire to satisfy their thirst for the Word of God; I acknowledge myself bound to obey God's calling by them."

*Question.* "Because you are a man, compassed with infirmity, will you not charitably, and with lowliness of spirit, receive admonition of your brethren, and if ye shall happen to slide or offend, in any point, will you not be subject to the discipline of the Church, as the rest of your brethren are?" The answer is long, therefore we give an abridgment of it.

*Answer.* "I acknowledge myself compassed about with infirmity and one that needs correction, and admonition, therefore, I willingly submit, to the wholesome discipline of this office, and charge. I confess myself worthy to be ejected if I be found inobedient, but in case of stubbornness, secretly or publicly given. For the vocation of God, to bear charge within this

desired to enter the Church before the Reformation, but through horror at its persecuting barbarities had not done so. He had been employed to draw up the Confession of Faith, together with Winram and Willocks. The former of these was a recent convert, having acted with the Romanists until the final Reformation. Willocks, on the contrary, had long been a Protestant, and in the course of a life of wanderings, arising from the persecutions to which he was subject, had practised both medicine and diplomacy. Carswell is noted for his Gaelic translation of the Liturgy. He subsequently accepted the "Tulchan" Bishopric of the Isles.

From the records of the General Assembly it seems that these superintendents were

Church, maketh not men Tyrants, nor Lords, but appointeth each of them '*Servants*,' '*Watchmen*,' and '*Pastors*' to the Flock."



bound to give, at every Assembly, an account of their services, or else to forward reasons for being absent. Until the full and perfect erection of a Presbyterian Church, the office of superintendent, visitor, or commissioner seems to have been admirably fitted to meet the wants of a time of transition when pastors, "few and far between," could with difficulty meet in a corporate capacity. Their admission was the same as that of pastor, their appointment a matter of expediency. In regard to personal labours, they were to be preachers themselves, preaching at least three times a-week. They were charged "to remain in no place above twenty days in their visitation, till they are passed through the whole bounds," preaching, planting churches, and inspecting the ministers, exhorters, and readers. They held office for life. They supplied desolate parishes with pastors, as they could be had, and were, in

general terms, guardians of the moral health of their districts.


The superintendents had strict discipline applied to them, many complaints being made of their laxity. Thus, on one occasion we find Erskine accused of admitting vicious priests as readers, and young men, without such trial as was framed in the Act of Assembly, to be exhorters. He promised to do what in him lay to remedy those evils. He had been much in the North at this time, having been commissioned to visit those districts, and to establish ministers, elders, and deacons.

## CHAPTER III.

ERSKINE AS SUPERINTENDENT OF ANGUS  
AND MEARN.

IN the end of the year 1560, the Dauphin, now King of France, died at Orleans. Mary left France for Scotland shortly after, arriving in August, 1561. This event made a great change in the land; but it seems a special providence that the Reformers had got so far in their work before this Princess set foot on Scottish soil.

At the tenth General Assembly, Erskine, with others, was nominated to draw up a letter to the Queen “against violaters of the rest of the Lord’s-day, and that petitions may be resorted to in favour of provision



for all the ministers, readers, and exhorters."

The Superintendent of Angus and Mearns was chosen Moderator (or President) of the General Assembly in its meeting of December, 1565. The complaint against him of laxity in his office was repeated. With his usual candour, he acknowledged that many of his friends needed advice and caution, and he besought the Assembly to provide another to the office. This instance of his modesty and humility he frequently repeats. But the Assembly never granted him his desire, and he persevered in the office until debility of body disqualified him from the undertaking. He was also continued in the moderator's chair in the two succeeding Assemblies.

—A commission was given to Erskine about this time to investigate charges against Winram, the Superintendent of Fife. On

another occasion Erskine accused Willocks, Superintendent of the West, to the Assembly for negligence in suppressing idolatry. From these cases we learn both the equality of all the superintendents, and the Assembly's sovereignty over them.

While the affairs of the Church were prospering, those of the State, under the beautiful Mary, had gone from bad to worse, till they ended in her dethronement. She had several interviews with Knox, at one of which Erskine was present, and when she began to weep and sob at Knox's sternness, "the superintendent," says M'Crie, "who was a man of mild and gentle spirit, tried to mitigate her grief and resentment. He praised her beauty and her accomplishments, and told her that there was not a prince in Europe who would not reckon himself happy in gaining her hand." It was probably Erskine's gentleness, combined with his high

education, which secured Mary's favour to him. When on one occasion she was pressed to hear a reformed preacher, she expressed her preference for the Superintendent of Angus and Mearns, for he was "a mild and sweet-tempered man."

At the coronation of James VI. in July, 1567, after sermon by Knox, Erskine and Spotswood assisted him to put the crown on the King's head. He objected to the ceremony of unction as a Jewish rite, abused under the Papacy ; but on the present occasion it was deemed inexpedient to depart from the accustomed ceremonial, and it was therefore performed by the titular Bishop of Orkney.

In the course of the settlement of the North by the Earl of Moray, now Regent for the infant King, the Principal and Regents of Aberdeen University were summoned to give in their adherence to the Pro-

testant cause in terms of the following citation :—

“ We John Areskine, Superintendant of Angus and Mernes, and Commissioner within the bounds of the Sheriffdom of Aberdeen and Banff, and the ministers and Commissioners thereof, being assembled in the High Kirk of New Aberdeen, willing to reform abuses within the said bounds, and especially in the College of Old Aberdeen, we directly summoneds against E. Anderson, A. Galloway Subprincipal, Andrew Anderson, T. Ousten, D. Norrie, Regents of said College, to compear before us, that tryall might be taken if they were sound in Religion : Which being found, they are to be suffered to continue in their offices. Otherwise, if they are found corrupt with Popery, and errors not agreeable to the Truth as it is professed faithfully within the Kirk of Scotland to be deposed, and inhibited, to

teach and instruct the youth privately or publickly in that College, or any other School, or College, within the Realm; that others, well qualified, may be placed in their room, able to bring up the youth in the True Faith, Right Worship of God, and Good Letters.

“In the meantime, my Lord Regent’s Grace called before His Grace’s Council, the foresaid persons being delated to His Grace as very obstinate Papists, and Enemies to the Truth, and required them as Professors of Christ’s Religion, to subscribe the Articles following :—

“We whose names are undersigned do ratify and approve from our very hearts the Confession of Faith together with all other Acts concerning our Religion given forth in the Parliament holden at Edinburgh the 24th August 1560, and the 15th December 1567, and joyn ourselves as members



of the True Kirk of Christ, whose visible face is described in the said Acts, and shall in time coming be participant of the Sacraments now most faithfully and publickly ministered in the said Kirk, and submit to the jurisdiction and discipline thereof." On their refusal, Erskine, as Superintendent of Angus and Mearns, was commissioned by the Regent to reform that University, his own *alma mater*. The recusant principal and regents were prohibited to teach in the College, or in any other way. This process of removal was a slow and unpleasant one, as Anderson, the principal, had been known as a recusant in 1561, eight years before his deposition. Mr. James Lawson was now appointed principal, and many other shining lights in the Church taught in this University, bringing up the youth of Aberdeen in the fear of God, and imparting to them a liberal education.

On account, probably of his great reputation in the cause of education, Erskine seems to have been frequently employed as visitor of the Universities both of Aberdeen and of St. Andrews.

Erskine appeared as commissioner from Montrose at the Parliament summoned by Moray at Perth on the 28th July, 1569. This Parliament was called to deliberate on a proposal of Queen Elizabeth's to restore Mary to the throne. Wodrow says that Erskine "was very useful to the Regent, who stood for the King's undivided authority, and against the ministers of state for England."

The prospect of peace and prosperity to both Church and State, under the regency of Moray, was suddenly blighted by his assassination. Wodrow tells us that he visited Dun House about three weeks before his murder, and there received a prophetic warning from Erskine; but this warning,

which was only one of several the good Regent received, was unheeded. He fell by an assassin's bullet, to the lasting regret of his contemporaries and of posterity.

The good work of the Reformation was sadly marred, but, amid all these disasters, Erschine stood firmly to his post, in season and out of season. While the Earl of Moray was regent, he prevented any encroachments on the rights of the Church. Its revenues were divided and applied to the support both of religious and literary establishments, but under the following regents, who were less friendly to the Church or less able to check the avarice of powerful nobles, it was not so.

Moray was succeeded by Lennox, who fell much under the influence of the Earl of Morton. This man, in order to gain the incomes of the Church, fell upon the device of appointing "Tulchan" bishops, under

whose names their patrons drew the greater part of the stipends attached to their nominal sees.

At this period the Assembly was settling the bounds between civil and ecclesiastical authority, and struggled hard against the institution of "Tulchan" bishops which the Earl of Morton pressed first on Lennox, and then on his successor, the Regent Mar. Although Mar was indisposed to listen to him, Erskine took a leading part in this controversy on the side of the Church, and addressed to him a most able letter on the subject, composed in a clear, spirited, and forcible style, and containing an accurate statement of the essential distinction between the civil and ecclesiastical jurisdictions in Scotland. It should be read by all who wish to know the sentiments of the early Church of Scotland on the subject. It was written in conjunction with Knox,

Pont, and Row, by the Assembly's orders. Wodrow in his life of Erskine says:—


“Anent the jurisdiction of the Church and what ought to pertain thereunto, and to be sisted at the Regent's hands, the Assembly ordeans the Superintendent of Angus and Mearns, Mr. John Knox, Mr. R. Pont, and Mr. J. Row to conveen every day at seven hours, and pen and put in order the Heads and Points in all sorts pertaining to the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction, and thereafter to present the said Heads to the Assembly to be sighted and considered by them, to the Lord Regent's Grace, with the instructions to be given to the Commissioners who are to be sent to his Grace.” The essence of the letter thus drawn up is as follows:—

(Dated 10th November 1571.)

“DEAR LORD,—I thought it expedient to let your Grace know my judgement

in these articles and heads contained in your Grace's last writing. As to the pensions appointed before unto the Regent's House, little difficulty will be therein. . . . As to the provision of Benefices this is my judgement. All Benefices of Tiends, (or having tiends joyned thereto, or annexed thereto) which are taken up by the People's labours, have the Offices joined unto them, which Office is the preaching of the Evangel and ministration of the Sacraments, and this Office is spiritual and belongeth to the Church, who only hath the distribution and ministration of spiritual things. . . . As well to the Church, to Bishops or Superintendents apperteaneth the examination and admission of men to offices and Benefices whether Abbays or Priories, . . . the apostle Paul writes, 'the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men, who shall

be able to teach others also' (2 Timothy ii. 2). Here the Apostle referreth the examination to Timothy of the quality and ability of the persons, where he sayeth 'To teach others also.' . . . And he says in his previous Epistle 'Lay hands suddenly on no man' until just examination of their manners and doctrines. . . . This is a spiritual power and jurisdiction which God hath given to His Church and to those who bear office therein, and there is a Temporal jurisdiction given of God to Kings and Civil Magistrates. Both these powers are of God and most agreeing to the fortifying of one another if they be rightly used. . . . A greater offence and contempt of His Church can no Prince do than to set up by his own authority men in spiritual offices, as to create Bishops and Pastors of the Church, this to do is to place the Church as having no jurisdiction or liberty and to the hurt of Kings





or others in their Patronages. And yet the Church most humbly suiteth your Grace and Council to have the same fulfilled, but if this cannot be granted, I mean the dismembring (as they call it) of Great Benefices, I trust in respect of this confused and troublesome time of the Church will consent (the Benefices and Offices joyned thereto being given after order before spoken of that the privilege and liberty of the Church be not hurt) to assign such profit as may be spared above the reasonable sustentation of the ministry, to the maintenance of the authority and common affairs for the present, while further orders may be taken in these matters. . . . For the Church contendeth not for worldly profit, but for that Spiritual Liberty which God hath given, and the servants of God will oppose all Tyranny which presumeth to rob her of it. They will according to their power reprove all ungodliness, and God's



righteousness will stand for ever, therefore . . . 'Be wise, oh ye Kings, be ye learned oh ye that are Judges of the earth, serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice before Him with reverence. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and ye perish from the right way, for His wrath will be shortly kindled.'

"The Superintendents that are placed ought to continue in their offices notwithstanding any others that intrude themselves, or are placed by such as have no power in such offices. They may be called Bishops, but are not Bishops but 'Idols.' They are called 'Idol Shepherds' as sayeth the prophet. Zechariah xi. 17.

"I cannot but lament from my very heart that great misorder used at Stirling at the last Parliament in creating them, placing them, and giving them vote in Parliament as Bishops, in despite of the Church and high contempt of God."

This letter contains six pages of writing. From our extracts from it, it is very plain that in the superintendent's judgment, bishops, superintendents, pastors, and ministers are one and the same office, having the cure of souls, the preaching of the Gospel, and the administration of the sacraments for their work.

Erskine sent a second letter to the Regent, in which he says :

“Being in Perth I received a letter from your Grace's hands specifying also an inhibition, . . . that poor ministers not convicted of any crimes nor offences yet their living is commanded to be holden from them. . . . It may appear most justly to all men that the destruction of the Church and ministry that is sought for : Benefices are given and Bishops are made at men's pleasure without the consent of the Church. . . . If your Grace consider the matter well ye will call

back the Letters of Inhibition. If not, the Church will have patience and look for help at the Lord's hands."

This second letter was despatched five days only after the former one, so eager was the superintendent in the cause of his well-beloved Church, now menaced by the greed of the nobles, hungry for its tithes, and the Erastian policy of men in power, jealous of its independence. Mar sent his reply to both epistles at once, and said :

" RIGHT TRUSTIE CUSINE,—“ After most hearty commendations, . . . we received our two letters conteaning other effect and matter than our expectation was. In consideration of our good meaning to have travelled by all possible means for quieting the Church, . . . which we have found a fashious burden, . . . and yet when indifferent men shall look on the words of this Inhibition . . . we trust it

will be taken as it ought to be taken, . . . nor otherwise any mention of quieting, or ordering what was amiss, still reteaning the privilege of the King, Crown, and Patronage. The default of the whole stands in this, that the Policy of the Church is not perfect, nor any solid conference among godly men that are well willed and of judgement, how the same may be helped. . . . Whereanent we have written to deferr the matter to the Convention of Estates of the Realm, . . . while time and advice will work its effects, etc.—Your assured good friend,

“JOHN, Regent.”

Wodrow says of this letter : “That the Earl of Mar fearing rigorous methods would not, discharged the Letters of Inhibition which (it may be) were designed by the Earl of Morton (the assistant of the present Regent) to frighten at the first and then to be as a favour when withdrawn, in order

to manage Ministers to have some kind approbation of what had been doing or done. It was the easiest way of replying to the Superintendent's two letters to take this general indeterminate way. The Regent's reply is full of deference and kindness, and very well calculated to gain upon such, one so generous and charitable a man as the Laird of Dun was."

A convention was then held at Leith, on 15th January, 1572. It consisted of superintendents, ministers, and elders, and was a General Assembly in reality, though not in name. "The whole brethren convened, in one voice and mind gave full commission and power to the generous and loving brother John Areskine of Dun, Superintendent of Angus and Mearnes with others, to propound Articles." These articles consist of about twenty pages, which are much taken up with what the Church, colleges,

and schools should maintain. One paragraph only we shall retain: "That it is deliberated and commanded that all Bishops, Superintendents, Preachers, and Ministers of the Word of God shall earnestly and diligently admonish the people within their cures to continue in their faith and obedience to the King's Majesty our Sovereign Lord, and his Regent and authority, and whoever hath made defection or hereafter shall make defection from the same obedience, to admonish them, and in case of their wilfulness and obstinacy to proceed against them by censure of the Church and excommunication." The general tenor of these articles was that of submission to the institution of bishops. The convention "thus answered the Earl of Morton's design of getting the disposal of the Benefices of Church Lands and did not much affect the Reformation Government of this Church, since the

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Bishops, such as they were, subjected themselves to the Assembly in hearing complaints of corrupt and timeserving men, and censuring them which accepted of Bishopricks, and they gave our General Assemblies a continual struggle against this imposition of Nominal Bishops for about six years, until they flatly declared the office unlawful" (*Wodrow*).

Erskine had been carried away with the rest to agree to bishops, to prevent a breach between the Church and Council, because they then seemed inevitable, but from his letters we know that he did not like them. The second General Assembly after the convention, in which he was Moderator, followed the example of its immediate predecessor in appointing a committee "to oversee and consider the conclusions at Leith, and what they find therein to be retained or altered with the Regent's Grace and Council." It presented to the As-

sembly a protestation which was in these words :—

“Forasmeikle as the Assembly held at Leith with the Nobility and Commissioners to reason and conclude on Articles, etc., they found certain names such as the Archbishop, Dean, Archdean, Chancellor, and Chapter appearing to have sound or affinity to Papistry and Superstition, and in like manner protest, that the said Articles be only received in the meantime, until further and more perfect order may be obtained at the hand of the King’s Majesty, Regent, and Nobility, for the which they will press as occasion shall serve.”

Wodrow says: “I have set this affair of Tulchan Bishops in as plain a light as my materials allow me, and as the Laird of Dun vigorously opposed them, so when the end of the year arrived the Regent Morton (who was in favour of them) was raised to



the Regency." Finally, at the thirty-second Assembly, four years after the convention at Leith, when Erskine himself was present, they reasoned concerning the opinion of the brethren given in the last Assembly on the question, "Whether if Bishops, as they now are in Scotland, have their function out of the Word of God?" After reasoning and long disputation, they agreed "That the name of 'Bishop' is common to all them that have a particular flock over the which he hath a peculiar charge as well to preach the Word, to minister the Sacrament, and, (along with the elders) to execute the Ecclesiastical discipline. This is the chief function : moreover out of this number may be chosin some to have power to oversee and visit such reasonable bounds (beside his own flock) as the General Assembly may appoint : and in these districts to appoint ministers, with consent of the

ministers of that Province, and to appoint Elders and Deacons in every said Congregation, with consent of the people thereof."

But the situation of the Church, nevertheless, remained critical. While the Court and the upper barons upheld Prelacy, the Evangel established by law was still Presbyterian.

Bishoprics and other great benefices were now openly conferred on noblemen and persons totally unqualified for the ministry, and even on minors. These proceedings created much dissatisfaction, and the Assembly pronounced the following resolution on the subject :—"That certain Titles such Archbishop, Dean, Archdean, Chancellor and Chapter which savoured of Popery, and were scandalous and offensive to their ears, unanimously protested against them."

In the midst of all these troubles the Church lost her greatest pillar, and Erskine

an attached friend. John Knox died in Edinburgh on the 24th November, 1572. His last days had been embittered by the new struggle with Prelacy, but the old spirit remained in him to the last, when he refused to inaugurate the "Tulchan" Archbishop of St. Andrews. He and Erskine had worked well together, though cast in very different moulds, fighting their way through the wilderness, even as Moses and Aaron did.

The old heroes of the Reformation were fast dying out, and their successors, dreading the resentment of Morton, were lovers of peace. Had it not been for a few energetic spirits, stirred up from time to time by a gracious Providence, the glorious Reformation would have been quenched in the darkness of Morton's Erastian Prelacy.

## CHAPTER IV.

## CLOSING SERVICES TO THE CHURCH.

THE Erastian usurpation on the Church, under Morton's Regency, made it necessary for the Assembly to define anew the constitution of the Church. For though these phantom bishops had neither Episcopal ordination nor share in the government of the Church, still the introduction of their nominal dignities threatened its peace. With this view the Assembly appointed commissioners to draw up a Second Book of Discipline, among whom was the Laird of Dun. He was present at all their Associations; but we are told that "the Head given to him for solution was

declared, conforme to the order of distribution, being in the Judgement of the Assembly obscure and mystic, they desired him to confer with the rest of the Commissioners, to the effect he may be resolved in the meaning thereof."

Morton opposed the scheme, but the Church said in reply—"We are conveened at Commandment of our Master and Head of the Church, Christ Jesus, who hath commanded, when His Church has any trouble, the members thereof to convene and set the Church at rest and quietness, and do away with any corrupt doctrine or false usage." Erskine again resigns his superintendentship, probably feeling the infirmities of age a disqualification, but the Assembly did not accept his resignation. On the contrary, it appointed him, along with five others, "to pass to my Lord Regent's Grace the Heads and Articles which the Twenty-ninth General Assembly

had put in writing, to confer thereupon, and to require his Grace's answer, and to report the same to the next Assembly." But Calderwood tells us that they got not their reply which they expected.

The commissioners on the Second Book of Discipline met in conference on their work in Stirling Castle, on the 22nd December, 1578, and chose Erskine to be their Moderator "for the better order and reasoning during the said conference, and appointed the houre of convention to be at nyne houres before noone, and to reason till twelve, and from two houres afternoone till five houres at even." At this session the whole book was revised by the commissioners. It was presented complete, and approved by the Assembly in 1579, and came into force two years later. It has ever since remained an authoritative compend of the Church's laws.

About this time we have a signal proof of Erskine's close attention to his ecclesiastical duties. This is an Act of the Privy Council exempting him from his duties as a temporal baron, both indemnifying him for non-attendance in the past, and assoilzieing him in time to come, so long as he should hold the office of superintendent.

On the subject of the introduction of Episcopacy we have a long letter from Erskine, penned in the prolix style of his age. The sum and substance of it appears to be a protest against the Erastianism then strong among the nobles, and a last remonstrance against the alienation of the temporalities, which should belong to the Church instead of going to fill the pockets of the peerage. Erskine's letter shows both the wrong and the remedy.

In 1578 Morton was forced to resign the Regency, and James VI. began to rule in




person. But James and his courtiers were as determined as Morton had been to make their so-called bishops "the needle to draw in the Episcopal thread" (*James Melville*).

From this time onward it may be noticed that Erskine's title of superintendent is silently dropped in the Assembly's registers, he being generally styled instead "Laird of Dun." Although now seventy years old, he was appointed a member of a sort of standing committee, to confer with the moderator during the Assembly's sittings. This committee met at seven in the morning. It was this Assembly that presented a beautiful and touching address to the king concerning the printing of the Bible, "imploring him to set forward religion and Reformation, not looking how much is done, but how much rests unperformed." Erskine was nominated with other five "to treat, confer, and reason for a settled order and



form of provision of the ministers' stipends, of the estates of the Church, and to reduce the same to certain perfection together with the platform of Presbyteries as seemeth best in their judgement." The young king was at this period quite in favour of proclaiming a "Godly Policy."

The Laird of Dun was sent to the king to crave that a stop might be put to the education of Scottish youth in Popish schools abroad, and that, in order to the reformation of the University of St. Andrews, the king might cause the foundation, erection, and other papers of the college to be exhibited, and that Andrew Melville might be brought from Glasgow and placed in the New College. Erskine was at this time, probably on account of his well-known zeal in the cause of education, a commissioner of the Assembly, together with Pont, Craig, and others, to visit St. Andrews University, and



to arrange the studies of the students. He had previously been nominated on a commission to "Cognosce, visie and consider the Patrimonie and rents of the Universitie of St. Andrews, and to seirch further mair specialle to consider quhat other special points or clauses should appertean to the Jurisdiction of the Church."

Erskine's love for literature, and his desire that Scotland should participate in all the advantages to be had on the Continent, is well seen in his sending for Stephanus, the printer, to Edinburgh. This man was a learned Dane, who was long exceedingly useful as a printer in his adopted country.

The Laird of Dun's services were again required in 1583 as a peacemaker between the king and his nobility, whom the Raid of Ruthven had put at variance. In spite of all his attempts to make an agreement,

Wodrow says the endeavour met with but little success. Erskine's peace-loving tendencies occasionally lessened the fervour of his testimony for truth, more especially now when he was growing old and infirm. According to Wodrow, "he wanted full information of Court matters, and from his apprehensions of extremities being enforced against ministers, seems out of his regard for peace to have given way."

In the settlement of the Presbyteries of the Church the Laird of Dun was, in the year 1586, named by the Assembly, together with several others, to consider the plans for their erection, and was very useful to the king and Council in different ways. He was among those appointed in the following year to present the Church's articles and petitions to the king's Parliament, and again, when the Assembly nominate their commissioners and visitors, he is in the

list for Angus and Mearns, but, on account of his age and infirmity, the work devolved chiefly upon Mr. William Christesone.

From this date his public appearances for Christ and His cause were less frequent. The General Assembly of 1587 was the last at which he was present, but even at it his services were required on a committee to promote the "Removal of ane matter of grief by the King's Majesty against Mr. John Cowper and Mr. James Gibson." At the same time he was nominated on a committee to collect Acts of Parliament made by the kings or regents for the true liberty of the Church of God and Christ's religion as then established in this realm, and for the repression of Popery and idolatry. His zeal and labours for the Reformed Church of Scotland continued unabated to the day of his death. His eventide was passed in labour even as his noonday had been.

Many duties were from time to time devolved upon him which his sound judgment, conciliatory disposition, and great experience of affairs enabled him to execute with advantage to the Church. Though he lived through the most stormy and eventful period of its history, and acted a most prominent part in its transactions, he was yet permitted to see its full course, from its escape from Popish domination to its final and peaceful establishment in Presbyterianism; and not only to see, but also to bear a great part in bringing forward this happy consummation.

Although Erskine's days of active service were now almost over, in the great alarm occasioned by the approach of the Spanish Armada, his official position caused his name to be included in a commission to warn and prepare the people of the North; but he, "in respect of his age and infirmity, giveth his Commission to another." He

was, indeed, at this time laid on a bed of sickness. On account of the change in the calendar there is some difficulty in fixing the exact date of his decease, but it was at some period in the year 1591 that this venerable servant of Jesus Christ entered into the joy of his Lord. His death took place in his own house at Dun, but no monument marks the place of his burial. He left a numerous posterity behind him.

Johnston, a Scottish poet of this age, who employed himself much in writing Latin verses on the Reformers and other distinguished men of his day, has the following verses on Erskine :—

JOHANNES ARESKINUS

Dunius, Equestri Famili Ortus, Religionis, gravis et  
constans Assertor. Natus annos LXXX moritur  
12 Marti 1590.

Post tot avos veteres, et tot decora inclyta rerum  
Surgit Areskinus gloria major adhuc ;  
Scilicet crucis Christi, quæ sola perennis,  
Quæ regit una homines, quæ facit una Deos

Robora consiliis, pietatem miscet utrisque  
Et facienda docet, atque docenda facit  
Heroem nullum huic aequarint secula. Nullus  
Inter avos veteres fama et honore prior.

This Latin poem has been translated by  
an honoured friend, the Rev. J. A. Wylie,  
LL.D., as follows :—

JOHN ERSKINE of Dun,  
Descended of a noble family, a zealous and consistent  
Professor of Religion, and a powerful Preacher.  
Died on the 12th of March, 1590, aged 80 years.

After a long line of ancestors,  
After many illustrious actions,  
The name of Erskine is adorned  
By a still greater glory,  
That of the cross of Christ,  
Which alone is everlasting,  
Which alone makes men good,  
Which alone fits them for heaven.  
He united decision with wisdom,  
And tempered both with piety.  
His principles and his practice  
Mutually harmonised.  
Past ages gave birth to no better man.  
No one of his ancient progenitors  
Surpassed him in reputation and honour.

Erschine's labours and trials had, indeed, been great. As an office-bearer of the infant Church, he had had much to bear from the pretences of concealed Papists and the struggles with the "Tulchan" bishops, whose position conflicted with that of the superintendent. There were all the difficulties of supplying those cures whose occupants had been turned out, and many other perplexities and trials. Yet he had the sweetness, light, and satisfaction that come to those who "run well" and bear fruit.

His reputation in his own time stood deservedly high. Row mentions him as being strict in the doctrine and discipline of the Church of Scotland, and a zealous opponent of the hierarchy. James Melville, nephew to Andrew Melville, mentions the Superintendent of Angus and Mearns in connection with his father, who derived much benefit from his acquaintance with



Erskine. He speaks of him as one of "the greatest lights of that age within the country in the town of Montrose," as a "notable instrument in the Church of Scotland." Wodrow says of Erskine: "This worthy and excellent gentleman was very early brought from the corruptions of Popery, and had the peculiar honour to be among the first of any person of his rank who favoured the Reformation. His share in that glorious work was very great, both by his entertaining ministers and preachers, protecting them, encouraging learning and learned men, and preaching the Gospel himself when regularly called thereto by the ministers of our first General Assembly; as also by his interest with the nobility and gentry of Scotland, to many of whom he was related, and his wise and prudent conduct in so critical a time. After the Reformation was set up, the Lord continued him upwards of thirty years in

Angus and Mearns, the frontier station, as it were, betwixt the Reformed in the South and too many remaining Papists in the North. He was generally a member, and very useful, in all our assemblies, and sat in fifty General Assemblies, if not more. Indeed, his easy and sweet temper led him sometimes to think better than he had reason of the Queen Regent; brought him to be ensnared by the Earl of Morton in the affair of the Convention at Leith and the Tulchan Bishops, and which was the escape of several of our Worthies at the period; he kepted the matter of the Reformation from Popery in *worship* and *doctrine*, so much in his eye, as not so much for some time to prosecute the Reformation in discipline and government, as was proper. Yet when he came to consider that subject well, he was hearty and zealous in these also. In his old age, and in an hour of

sore temptation, he made some compliance with King James when under the management of Adamson and Arran ; but when the trial was over, he went heartily on with his brethren prosecuting the concerns of the Church. In short, he has the honour to be among the first who professed the Reformation in the North of Scotland, and to have a very great share in bringing it about. He was a person of singular prudence, great generosity and liberality, and considerable learning, and very bold and zealous. But, above all, he was singularly pious and religious, and from close walking with God had sometimes communications of His mind."

In more modern times Dr. M'Crie has given a very just estimate of the Superintendent:—

"It is proper to notice the death of John Erskine, the venerable Superintendent of Angus and Mearns. This enlightened and public-spirited baron will be remembered as

one of the most distinguished patrons of literature in Scotland. In the wars against the English he had displayed his courage and love to the independence of his native country. He embarked with great zeal in the struggle for the Reformation ; and after the triumph of that cause, served the Church, first as a superintendent, and afterwards as a parochial minister. If, at a later period, he suffered himself to be entangled by the politics of the Court, and lent the influence of his name to the support of measures injurious to the Church, his advanced age, and the difficulties of the times, may be pleaded as an extenuation of his fault. When incapacitated for active employment, he retained his literary habits, and continued in his closet to pursue his studies connected with the sacred profession to which he had devoted himself."

## APPENDIX.

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**JOHN SPOTSWOOD**, Superintendent of Lothian.—Spotswood was born in 1510, of ancient and honourable parentage. He was educated at Glasgow, and under the famous John Major. His first inclination was to study divinity, but about the year 1538 he was wholly turned from the Romish Church by its persecutions of those whom it called heretics. His presence, both at the martyrdom of Russell and Kennedy in this year, and at the preaching of other reformers in St. Andrews and Edinburgh filled him with very bad impressions of the Popish clergy. While in this state of mind he went to London to apply himself to some secular business. There he became acquainted with Archbishop Cranmer, and was by him brought

to a knowledge of the truth. He had a particular concern about the Gospel in his native land, which he revisited in 1542 in connection with the embassy of the restored prisoners of Solway Moss, which Henry VIII. sent to Scotland to promote his policy there. Spotswood now made the acquaintance of the Earls of Glencairn and Lennox, and was employed by Lennox in various negotiations with the Court of England. Wodrow notices these facts about Spotswood, as his knowledge of public affairs was afterwards very useful to him.

He had been already connected with the family of Sandilands of Calder, a house devoted to the Reformation, and is said by Wodrow to have been most useful in turning them from darkness to light. Sir James Sandilands now presented him to the parish of Calder, which he held till his death. He accompanied Lord James Stewart to France in 1558, and at the settlement of the Reformed Church he was employed in framing the Confession of Faith and First Book of Discipline.

When the Superintendents were first appointed

in 1560, Spotswood was nominated to Lothian. It is probable that he was the first who was admitted to the temporary office of the superintendentship. His duties of planting and visiting churches throughout his province were by no means light, for at his nomination there were probably not above four or five pastors within its bounds. But he never assumed any fragment of prelatic authority. He continued to exercise the pastoral charge of his flock at Calder, but had not much leisure to attend it. His parishioners complained that he was taken from them by his appointment as Superintendent, but the Assembly answered to the complaint that "the profit of many churches was to be preferred to the one of which he was settled." In 1563 Spotswood himself complained that he was not able to discharge his many avocations, being absent from his charge the most part of the year, and entirely engaged in public meetings, assemblies, and conferences.

When the Queen escaped from Lochleven to recommence the Civil War, a prayer meeting was held, when Mr. John Spotswood directed

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the following admonition :—"To all that profess, or have professed the Lord Jesus Christ and have refused that Roman Anti-Christ called the Pope, within the Dioces committed to his charge, desireth Grace, Mercy, and Peace from God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." He then says that the fearful curse denounced in Ezekiel on the watchman "that seeth the sword coming and doth not blow the trumpet compels me to warn you of that wicked Queen whose iniquity is known and lawfully convicted, therefore in the bowells of Christ Jesus I exhort all under my charge from God and from his lawful magistrates, by his word and good order that they by unfeigned repentance may return again from the stubborn Rebels and so escape condemnation in the day of the Lord Jesus ; whose omnipotent Spirit move the hearts of all that look for the life everlasting to consider that His coming approacheth. Amen. Given at Calder."

Spotswood resigned his superintendentship at the Assembly of 1574, but it was not practicable to permit such resignation till Presbyteries were



fully appointed. As he, however, had pleaded his great age, and being “unable to undertake the insupportable travails committed to him in his office,” the Assembly of 1575 appointed Mr. James Lowson his substitute. He retained his office till 1583, and was most helpful in all Church affairs. He died on the 5th December, 1585.

**JOHN WILLOCKS or WILLOX, Superintendent of the West.**—Of Willocks few materials for a biography have been preserved, perhaps because so much of his life was spent in England. We know nothing certainly of his birth or education, but he was probably born in Ayrshire. Spotswood says he was originally a Franciscan friar, and he had therefore access to anything of Scripture knowledge available in those dark times. Willocks early discovered the errors of Popery, probably from the sufferings of the martyrs under Cardinal Beaton, and he may have been particularly influenced by Wishart, who much frequented Kyle and Cunningham. On the outbreak of fiercer persecution he retired to Embden, in Holland, whence he frequently revisited Scot-

land on diplomatic missions. After his return to Ayrshire he had a great disputation with Kennedy, Abbot of Crossragael, concerning the Mass. Willocks maintained the Protestant position of the idolatrous nature of the Mass, while Kennedy defended the Romanist tenets concerning it.

In the Reformation crisis of 1559-60, Willocks took a prominent part. Only three preachers at this time appeared openly, but Willocks was among them, and it was at his suggestion that the Queen Regent was supplicated for just redress of their grievances. Dissimulation was her only reply, and war alone sufficed to set the Church on a Protestant basis. When that was done, Willocks was appointed Superintendent for the West. Sir James Balfour tells us that in this year a two days' public dispute touching the Mass was held by Willocks and one Black, a Dominican monk. He was also among those engaged in drawing up the Confession of Faith and First Book of Discipline. In 1563, he was chosen Moderator of the General Assembly, a post which he frequently filled. He seems to

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have gone to England shortly after this, for in 1567 Knox wrote to him earnestly inviting his return thence. Pecuniary straits in his Scottish charge appear to have occasioned this removal. He returned before 1568, for he was then re-elected Moderator; but, from the following letter addressed to him by James VI., he seems to have again gone to England. It is addressed to "Mr. Willocks, in England" and says: "Although I never doubted and have been sufficiently informed of the good-will borne towards me in all lawful sort, by all the other honest subjects of England who desire to profess the only true Religion by law established in both countries, yet having the same received and confirmed to me . . . all written by my hand . . . and in the princely word of a most Christian King, and that I will maintain the same religion, and that I will not permit any other religion but professed and avowed within the bounds of the Kingdom: and therefore by tongue or pen ye shall more perfectly inform them of my just intentions, and put down all such malicious reports. Thus I bid you farewell. JACOBUS REX."

Knox designates Willocks, "a man notable and grave, godly and learned." He died in England, at some date previous to 1590.

**JOHN WINRAM, Superintendent of Fife.**—Ever since the martyrdom of Patrick Hamilton, in 1527, Fife had been imbued with the reformed doctrines. Gavin Logie, of St. Leonard's College, St. Andrews, was very successful in instilling Protestantism into the students there, and was much assisted by John Winram, then Sub-Prior of the University, and also Prior of Kirkness and Portmoak. Notwithstanding his glimmerings of the truth, Winram did not openly come out of the Romish Church, and so far shared in its persecuting habits as to preach at Wishart's trial. But his sermon on that occasion, on Matthew xiii., hit as hard at the Romanists as it did at Wishart. Winram seems to have remained in the Roman Catholic Church until the Reformation was finally established. He then joined the Reformed Church, and having been declared "fit to preach the Word and minister the Sacraments," was appointed Visitor of St. Sal-

vator's College, St. Andrews, and Superintendent of Fife. He was also among those nominated to draw up the Confession of Faith and First Book of Discipline. But he still kept his former ecclesiastical titles, for, in 1578, we find him styling himself "*Prior insula Sancti Servani intra Lacum de Levin.*" He was somewhat slack in the visitations required by his office, and was, in 1569, censured for his negligence in repairing churches. Dr. M'Crie's estimate of Winram's character seems very just, that though his timidity and temporising conduct was often blamed by the Protestants, he was a man of mild disposition, considerable learning, and great influence.

He was present at the Convention of Leith, 1572, called by Morton ostensibly for the settlement of the Church, but in reality to introduce the "Tulchan" bishops. At the next General Assembly, in the same year, Winram demitted his superintendentship "of his own free will, requesting them earnestly to provide another in his room." A catechism of his composition belonging to the University of St. Andrews was

discovered by Dr. M'Crie. Winram died at an advanced age, on the 29th September, 1582.

**JOHN . CARSEWELL**, Superintendent of Argyle.—Respecting the birth and parentage of Carsewell little is known. His name first appears as a student at St. Andrews University in 1541. We do not even know whether he was in orders at the time of his appointment to be Superintendent of Argyle and the Isles, in 1560, but it is probable that before his nomination to this office he was of some standing for piety and knowledge. He formed an intimacy with Campbell of Kinzeancleugh, of which the following interesting letter alone survives as a memorial:—"Continual assistance of the Spirit of God be with you for salvation. In your letter addressed to me, Beloved Brother in the Lord, it appears you are sinisterlie informed towards me, because you write as menacing something against me. . . . As for your brother George's sickness, the Lord comfort him . . . the Minister of Edinburgh, and Superintendent of Glasgow, has written to me that they will excuse

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me at the General Assembly, as my presence at Kintyre is needful." This letter impresses us favourably with Carsewell's faithfulness in discharging the duties of his office, and his friendship with so godly a man as Campbell speaks much for his own religious character. The distance of his province from Edinburgh and the difficulties of journeying thither separated him much from the influence of the periodical Assemblies at headquarters.

His ecclesiastical position is somewhat vague, as he seems to have accepted at a later time the "Tulchan" bishopric of his district in addition to his less invidious rank of Superintendent, and even to have sat in Parliament on the strength of his Episcopal title. Carsewell is now remembered chiefly by his Gaelic translation of Knox's Liturgy, published by Lekprevik in 1567, a work alike honourable to himself and useful to the Celtic inhabitants of the wide-spread province placed under his charge.

